

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0435
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 0309

MKKO. 1165 : XGDS-2
TAGS: IS, JO, EG, PLO
SUBJECT: PEACE PROSPECTS: A VIEW FROM GAZA

REF: 77 TEL AVIV 10958

1. SUMMARY: GAZA CITY MANAGER ISAM SHAWWA STATED "PEOPLE WHO COUNT" IN GAZA REMAIN HOPEFUL ON PROSPECTS FOR PEACE. NEW JEWISH SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY TERMED AN INAPPROPRIATE GESTURE IN MIDST OF ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS, BUT SHAWWA NOT PARTICULARLY DISTURBED. HE LOOKS FORWARD TO END OF ISRAELI OCCUPATION, AND WEST BANK/GAZA LINKED TO JORDAN. RECOGNIZES THAT PLO NATURAL ADVERSARY OF SHAWWA CLAN, AND HAS LITTLE USE FOR PLO ASIDE FROM ITS INTELLECTUALS. IF EGYPT AND JORDAN CAN ENGINEER ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL--EVEN AT PRICE OF LIMITED ISRAELI MILITARY PRESENCE AND CONTINUED PRESENCE OF SETTLEMENTS--BELIEVES MOST WEST BANKERS AND GAZANS WOULD GET ON BOARD FOR SUCH AN AGREE-
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MENT. IN THE MEANTIME, SHAWWAS WAIT WHILE SADAT (AND ULTIMATELY HUSSEIN) HANDLE NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAELIS.
END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFF SPENT FIVE HOURS DISCUSSING CURRENT PEACE EFFORTS WITH ISAM SHAWWA, TOWN MANAGER OF GAZA. SHAWWA STATED THAT "THE PEOPLE WHO COUNT"

IN GAZA REMAIN HOPEFUL REGARDING PROSPECTS FOR PEACE. HE TERMED RECENT SETTLEMENT GROUND-BREAKING IN RAFAH APPROACHES AS "WRONG GESTURE" TOWARD SADAT. NONETHELESS, HE WASN'T PARTICULARLY DISTURBED BY THIS ACTIVITY. "THE BRITISH CONTINUED CONSTRUCTION IN GAZA UNTIL THE DAY THEY DEPARTED IN 1948."

3. WHEN ASKED TO PROVIDE HIS OPINION ON BEGIN'S SELF-RULE PROPOSAL FOR WEST BANK/GAZA, SHAWWA NOTED THAT HIS UNCLE, THE MAYOR OF GAZA, HAD PUBLICLY REJECTED IT. HOWEVER, HE RECOGNIZED THAT THE PROPOSAL WAS THE FIRST ISRAELI CARD IN WHAT WILL BE AN INVOLVED NEGOTIATING PROCESS. HE STATED THAT FROM THE SHAWWAS' PERSPECTIVE, THE END RESULTS SHOULD BE TERMINATION OF ISRAELI OCCUPATION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A LINK BETWEEN GAZA (AND THE WEST BANK) AND JORDAN. SHAWWA ADMITTED THAT AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE WAS NOT A REALISTIC POSSIBILITY AT THE PRESENT TIME--THE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT ALLOW IT.

4. WHEN ASKED HOW THE SHAWWAS WOULD FEEL ABOUT A CONDOMINIUM ARRANGEMENT (JORDAN, THE LOCAL INHABITANTS, AND ISRAEL) FOR THE WEST BANK/GAZA, HE STATED THAT "THE IMPORTANT THING WAS TO END THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION". IN HIS OPINION, IF THIS TYPE OF ARRANGEMENT PROVED ACCEPTABLE TO SADAT AND HUSSEIN, THERE

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WOULD BE NO GREAT DIFFICULTY SELLING IT TO WEST BANKERS AND GAZANS. OF COURSE, HE RECOGNIZED THAT THERE WOULD ALWAYS BE SOME WHO WOULD OPPOSE ANY SETTLEMENT, BUT THEY COULD BE CONTROLLED.

5. SHAWWA NOTED THAT GENERAL HAGOEL, THE MILITARY GOVERNOR FOR THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, HAD ASKED THE MAYOR SEVERAL TIMES TO TAKE ACTION IN SUPPORT OF SADAT AND HUSSEIN. THE SHAWWAS, HOWEVER, FEEL THAT THE TIME IS NOT RIPE FOR SUCH ACTIVITY. HOWEVER, IF SADAT AND HUSSEIN CAN COME TO AN AGREEMENT WITH BEGIN, SHAWWA SAID HE WOULD THEN SHOW "WHAT HE COULD AND WOULD DO".

6. IN DISCUSSING SHAWWA'S DEMAND FOR AN END TO THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION, EMBOFF SUGGESTED THAT ISRAELI-PERCEIVED MILITARY REQUIREMENTS MIGHT LEAD TO A LIMITED IDF PRESENCE IN THE GAZA AREA IN THE CONTEXT OF PEACE AGREEMENT. SURPRISINGLY, SHAWWA DIDN'T TERM THIS UNACCEPTABLE, BUT RETURNED TO HIS POINT THAT IN ORDER TO TERMINATE THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF GAZA SOME OBJECTIONABLE PEACE TERMS

MIGHT HAVE TO BE SWALLOWED. HE EVEN SUGGESTED THAT THERE MIGHT BE JOINT ISRAELI-JORDANIAN SECURITY PATROLS. WHEN ASKED IF, ON THE SAME BASIS, HE COULD ACCEPT THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE GAZA AREA, SHAWWA ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY. HE STATED THAT THE SETTLERS WOULD HAVE TO BE SUBJECT TO LOCAL LAWS, AND NOTED THAT JEWS HAD LIVED IN GAZA UNTIL 1929.

7. EMBOFF REMARKED THAT CONVERSATION HAS THUS FAR VERY NEATLY LEFT OUT THE PLO. SHAWWA RESPONDED THAT THE PALESTINIANS ARE NOT THE PLO, ALTHOUGH THE PLO IS A PART OF THE PALESTINIANS. HE SUGGESTED THE PLO MAY HAVE MISSED ITS BEST CHANCE TO JOIN THE PEACE PROCESS
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BY REJECTING SADAT'S INVITATION TO COME TO THE CAIRO CONFERENCE. SHAWWA POINTED TO ARAFAT'S RECENT STATE VISIT TO YUGOSLAVIA AS AN EFFORT BY TITO TO PROP UP THE PLO'S DECLINING FORTUNES.

8. SHAWWA CLAIMED THAT THE MAYOR HAD, DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO BEIRUT, TOLD ARAFAT THAT IF THE PLO COULD NOT OR WOULD NOT BECOME INVOLVED IN THE PEACE PROCESS, THEN THE PEOPLE ON THE SPOT MIGHT ULTIMATELY TAKE THEIR DESTINIES INTO THEIR HANDS. SHAWWA ADMITTED

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THAT "WE DON'T LIKE THE PLO". HE CRITICIZED TOP PLO LEADERS FOR THEIR HIGH-LIVING AND SAID THAT WITHOUT THEIR SUBSIDIES FROM ARAB STATES "THEY WOULD BE NO MORE THAN BEIRUT GANG LEADERS". SOME PLO INTELLECTUALS LIKE WALID KHALIDY AND NABIL SHAATH WERE FINE PEOPLE. AS FOR THE PLO GUNMEN, "THEY CAN COME AND VISIT", AS LONG AS THEY LEAVE THEIR GUNS ELSEWHERE.

9. CONVERSATION LED TO THE DISPOSITION OF GAZA'S REFUGEES IF PEACE CAME. SHAWWA STRESSED THAT THE REFUGEE CAMPS WOULD DEFINITELY HAVE TO BE BROKEN UP. IF GAZA COULD BECOME A FREE PORT IT WOULD BE ABLE TO ABSORB PART OF THE REFUGEES, BUT AT LEAST 150,000 WOULD HAVE TO BE RESETTLED ON THE WEST AND EAST BANKS.

10. THE EUPHORIA OF THE CONVERSATION DISSIPATED WHEN ONE OF THE REALITIES OF CURRENT GAZA LIFE FORCED
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ITSELF TO SHAWWA'S ATTENTION. A LOCAL MUKHTAR AND SCHOOLTEACHER CALLED ON HIM TO ASK FOR ADVICE ON HOW TO HANDLE A STICKY PROBLEM. ACCORDING TO SHAWWA, THE SCHOOLTEACHER'S SON, A STUDENT RETURNED FROM ABROAD, WAS BEING PRESSURED BY THE ISRAELIS INTO WORKING AS AN AGENT. SHAWWA SAID THAT HIS ADVICE TO HIS VISITORS WAS SIMPLY TO HAVE THE STUDENT SAY NO TO THE ISRAELIS, AND FOR HIM TO STICK WITH THIS DECISION WHATEVER COMES.

11. COMMENT: THE SHAWWAS, PROBABLY THE PARAMOUNT CLAN IN GAZA, ENDEAVOR TO MAINTAIN THEIR POSITION BY STAYING ON GOOD TERMS WITH ALL SIDES AND NOT STICKING THEIR NECKS OUT. THEY ARE MASTERS OF RIDING THE EBBS AND FLOWS OF ARAB POLITICS. THEY WANT, FIRST OF ALL, AN END TO THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION AND THE RETURN OF GAZA TO ARAB RULE. BUT THIS DOES NOT PREVENT THEM FROM HAVING CORRECT RELATIONS WITH THE ISRAELIS, OR FROM UTILIZING THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE. WHEN THE PLO WAS RIDING HIGH, THE SHAWWAS PUBLICALLY PAID OBEISANCE TO ITS ROLE AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, YET ALL THE WHILE WISHED IT WOULD STAY FAR AWAY FROM GAZA. THE SHAWWAS RECOGNIZE THAT THE OPTIMUM SITUATION FOR

THIER INTERESTS IS AN EGYPTIAN-JORDANIAN ENGINEERED
ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL, AND A JORDANIAN PRESENCE WHICH
WOULD KEEP PLO GUNMEN AND RADICALS IN LINE. CONSERVATIVE
IN THEIR ARAB NATIONALISM, THE SHAWWAS RECOGNIZE
THEIR AFFINITY WITH SADAT AND HUSSEIN (WHO THEY MAINTAIN
CONTACT WITH), AND HAVE NO LOVE FOR THE PLO (WHO THEY ALSO
KEEP IN TOUCH WITH). IF SADAT AND HUSSEIN, BACKED BY
THE SAUDIS, CAN WORK OUT AN ARRANGEMENT FOR THE WEST
BANK/GAZA, THE SHAWWAS WOULD PROBABLY BE ONLY TOO
HAPPY TO GET ON BOARD. ACCORDING TO ISAM SHAWWA, THEY
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WOULD BACK A PEACE AGREEMENT --- EVEN IF IT INCLUDED SUCH BITTER
PILLS AS LIMITED ISRAELI MILITARY PRESENCE AND THE
CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF JEWISH SETTLEMENTS--AS LONG
AS THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION WERE TERMINATED. HOWEVER,
NEGOTIATING THE ISRAELIS OUT OF GAZA IS THE BUSINESS
OF SADAT (AND ULTIMATELY HUSSEIN), AND IN THE
MEANTIME THE SHAWWAS CONTINUE TO PLAY THEIR WAITING
GAME.
LEWIS

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